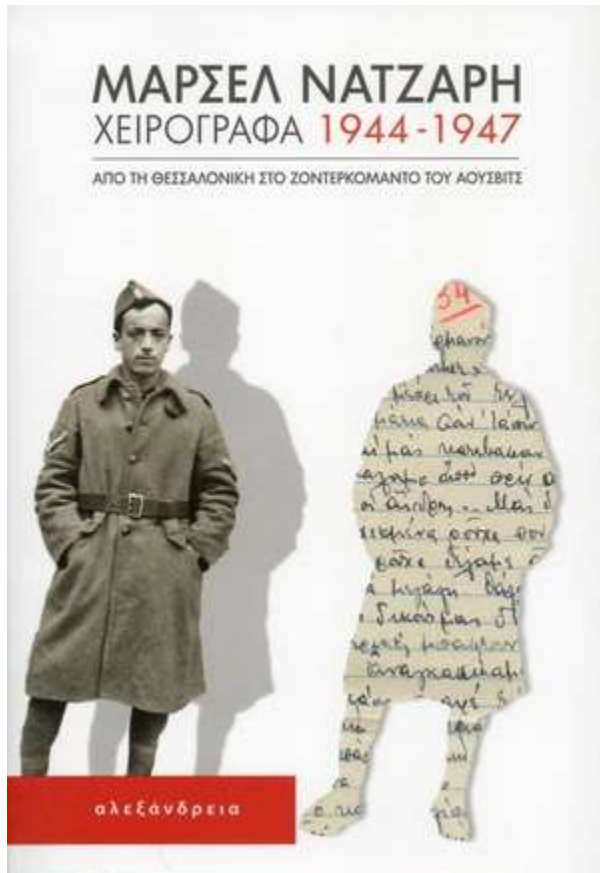


The Manuscripts of Marcel Nadjari

[Panagiotis Heliotis](#)

Μαρσέλ Νατζαρή (Marcel Nadjari), *Χειρόγραφα 1944-1947: Από τη Θεσσαλονίκη στο Ζόντερκομάντο του Άουσβιτς* (Hirografa 1944-1947: Apo ti Thessaloniki sto Sonderkommando tou Aousvits), Alexandria Publications, Athens 2018, 978-960-221-768-9, 21 cm × 14 cm, 240 pages, €14.-



Greetings to all. Remember Marcel Nadjari? He was a Greek Jew deported to Auschwitz in April 1944 where he supposedly worked in the *Sonderkommando* of Crematorium III. After the evacuation of the camp, he was sent to Mauthausen, then Melk, then Gusen II, then back to Mauthausen before liberation. In 1951, he moved to New York where he died in 1971 at age 54.

Previously we had but [a brief look at his testimony](#) from a book that contained excerpts from his memoir *Chronicle 1941-1945* (Etz Ahaim, 1991), which, it should be noted, was never distributed commercially.^[1] But a few weeks ago an updated edition was published under a new title: *Manuscripts 1944-1947 – From Thessaloniki to the Auschwitz Sonderkommando* (Alexandria, 2018). So now we can have an overall look. Let's begin.

Manuscript A

As already mentioned, Nadjari wrote two manuscripts, A and B. A was written in November 3, 1944, and it's a letter to a friend. It was found buried in the camp in 1980. Recently it was about 90% restored and

it is published here for the first time, page by page (pp. 39-50). The content is as follows (with comments when necessary).

PAGE 1

*“Bitte diessen Brief
Senden am [...]
[...] Griechischen
Konsulat.*

#

*Bardzo proszę [...]
w konsulacie Grecji
[...] ce quelque mots
[...] mort
[...] plus
[...] Consulat de Grece afin que
[...] ahier [...] et a sq destin*

*Dimitrios A. Stefanides
Rue Kroussovo No 4
Thessaloniki
GRECE”*

The first page is not in Greek but it appears as above. It seems to be instructions in various languages for sending the letter.

PAGE 2

*“To my beloved ones,
Dimitrios Athan. Stefanides,
Elias Cohen – Georgios Gounaris.*

My dear company, Smaro Efremidou (of Athens) and so many others which I always remember, and to finish, to my dear homeland GREECE, to which I have always been a good citizen.

We started from our Athens on April 2, 1944 after I was snatched on at the camp in Haidari, where I would always receive the packages of the good Smaro and her efforts for me that are unforgettable in these hard days I am going through. I will [...] always to [...] look for [...] my Metsos and sometimes [...] to [...] but take care of [...] her address [...] our Elias and always take care of him [...] and that Manolis has not forgotten them.”

Metsos refers to Dimitrios Stefanides, and Manolis (Emmanuel) is the real first name of Nadjari.

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“And even more that as it unfortunately seems we will never meet again.

After ten days of travel, on April 11 we arrived at Auschwitz where we were sent to the Birkenau camp stayed about one month in quarantine and from there they took the healthy and strong. Where? Where? My Metsos? To a crematory, I will explain further on the nice work that the Almighty wished for us to do.

There is a large building with a wide smokestack with 15 (fifteen) furnaces. Underneath a garden there are two large underground vast chambers. The one is used to undress and the other chamber of death where the people enter naked and after it's full with about 3,000 persons it is closed and they gas them, they give up the spirit.

Our job was first to receive them. Most of them"

There are serious inaccuracies here for someone who spent 8 months at the camp.

First, he speaks of one large building with 15 furnaces where there were two. Second, the chambers were not underneath a garden as there was no garden and the chambers were not completely underground, as their roof was one meter above ground. Third, they were large but certainly not "vast". The room that served as the gas chamber was 30 meters long, a little more than a basketball field (28 meters). It had a surface area of some 210 m². If we assume a maximum possible packing density of some 10 persons per square meter, that would amount to 2,100 people. But that would require military-style discipline to achieve!

This description doesn't seem to stem from direct observation.

PAGE 4

"did not know the reason, they cried when they were told that they were going to take a shower and they went ignorant towards death. Until today [...] said they are for the oven [...] tell them lies I would only say I did not understand the language they speak and to the people, men and women that I saw were doomed, would say the truth. After [...] all naked they walked to the chamber of death. In there the Germans had placed pipes on the ceiling [...] to make them think they prepare the shower. With whip in hand the Germans forced them to pack so it fits as many as possible, a real sardine can of humans, then they closed the door hermetically. The gas cans would come with the car of the Germ. Red Cross with two S.S. [...] They are gas men who through some"

These statements are confusing. First, Nadjari claims that their first task was to receive the victims (implying in the undressing room) where he spilled the beans to those who were doomed to die, while playing dumb with the rest. But what were they doing there? Only those unfit for work were sent to the crematorium. Also, the victims appear crying upon hearing about the shower, but at the same time remain ignorant as they enter. This does not make any sense, and as we will soon see the details of this story are different in the second manuscript.

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"openings would throw at them the gas.

After half an hour we would open the doors and our work would begin. We would transport the corpses of these innocent women and children to the elevator that would take them to the furnaces chamber and from there they would place them in the furnaces where they would burn without the use of fuel because of the fat they contained. From a human around 640 grams of ash only would be produced [...] which the

Germans forced us to smash, pass through a thick sieve and then a car would take it to throw it in the river near us, Vistula, and this is how they erase every trace.

The dramas that my eyes have seen are indescribable. In front of my eyes they have passed about 600,000 (six hundred thousand) Jews from Hungary – French – Polish from Litsmanstad, about 80,000 and recently”

Except for the fact that the gassing description is pretty vague, the claim about furnaces working without fuel is so nonsensical that casts even more doubt that Nadjari ever worked in a crematorium. In addition, it is a well-known fact that the ashes remaining from the cremation of a body amount to some 5% of the body's original weight. [2] Assuming an average weight of 60 kg, the ashes would have amounted to some 3 kg, not just 640 grams. However, if the cremation remains had to be smashed and sieved, this indicates an incomplete cremation, hence an even larger amount of cremation remains.

PAGE 6

“they are starting to arrive about 10,000 (ten thousand) Jews from Theresienstadt in Czechoslovakia. Today a transport from Theresienstadt arrived but thank God they did not bring them to us, they kept them in a lager, they say an order came not to kill Jews anymore and it appears to be true, now in the end they changed their mind, but now no Jew is left in Europe. But for us it's different, we must disappear from the Earth because we know too much of their unimaginable ways of abuse and revenge.

Our own commando is called Sonder kommando (special commando), initially it was made up of 1,000 (a thousand) 200 of them Greeks and the rest Polish, and Hungarians and after a Heroic Resistance because they wanted to remove 800 (eight hundred) the one hundred all fell outside the camp”

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“and the others inside.

My good friends Vicko Vrudo and Mois Aaron from Thessaloniki fell.

Now that this order came they will also remove us, we are 26 Greeks in all and the rest are Polish. At least for the Greeks we are determined to die like real Greeks, as every Greek knows how to die, showing up to these last moments, despite the villains' superiority, that Greek blood runs through our veins as we showed in the Italian war.

My dear ones you will wonder by reading the work I did, how could I Manolis or anyone else do this work burning my coreligionists, I wondered the same in the beginning, I thought many times to go”

PAGE 8

“with them to end it but revenge always kept me. I wished and I wish to live to avenge the death of Dad, Mom and my dear sister Nellie. I am not afraid of death, how could I be afraid of him after everything my eyes have seen? Because of this my Elias, my dear cousin, if I am gone you and all my friends should know your duty. I learned from my little cousin, Sarrika Houli (you remember her in my house), she lives today, that Nellie was with your little sister Errika during her last moments.

My only wish is for your hands to receive what I am writing.”

PAGE 9

“My family’s fortune I leave to you Metsos – Dimitrios Athanasiou Stefanides – with the request to take with you my cousin Elias.

Elias is a Cohen, and consider him as if you had myself, always take care of him and if by any chance Sarrika Houli returns, my cousin, do to her my Metsos whatever you did to your dear to me niece Smaragda, because we are all suffering here as no man’s mind can imagine.

Remember me sometimes as I remember you.

It wasn’t meant for me to see our Greece free as you saw it in 12/10/44.

Whoever asks about me tell him that I am no more and that I went as a real Greek. Help, my Metsos, those who return from the camp”

PAGES 10-11

“at Birkenau. I am not sorry, my Metsos, that I will die, but that I will not be able to avenge as I want and know.

If you receive any letter from our relatives abroad reply appropriately that the A. Nadjari family perished murdered by the civilized Germans (New Europe), my George do you remember?

The piano of my Nellie, Metsos, take it from the Sionidou family and give it to Elias to have it with him always so he can remember her, he loved her so much, and she also.

Almost every time they kill I wonder if there is a God and nevertheless I always believed in him and I still believe that God wants it, let his will be done.

I die happy knowing that right now our Greece is Free, I will not live, let the others live, my last word will be Long Live Greece.

Marcel Nadjari”

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“It’s been about four years that they kill the Jews [...] killed Polish, Czechs, French, Hungarians, Slovaks, Dutch, Belgians, Russians and all of Thessaloniki except from some 300 who live until today in Athens, Arta, Corfu, Kos and Rhodes.

About 1,400,000 in all. General [...] my beloved ones.

#

[...] in 3/11/44.

[...] my beloved uncle [...] Gabbai or Evangelos Fragiades [...] (Pericles 52) (Stadiou 60) Athens.

These are my last words and [...] I am happy [...] that you stay and your loved one [...] in the New Truth [...].”

PAGE 13

“The Venerable Greek Embassy upon receiving this note is urged by a good Greek Civilian named Emmanuel or Marcel Nadjari from Thessaloniki ex resident Italy Street No 9 in Thes/niki,

To send this note to the address below.

*Dimitrios Athanasiou Stefanides
Kroussovo Street No 4
Thessaloniki
Greece*

This is my last wish, condemned to death, by the Germans because my religion is Jewish.

*Thankful
M. Nadjari”*

Manuscript B

Now let’s have a look at Manuscript B. This one is a more detailed memoir written in 1947. As Nadjari writes, after arrival at Birkenau, they first went to the Sauna, where they handed over their clothes and valuables. The next morning, they received their tattoos before going for a shower and a full haircut (head and body). Afterwards they stayed in quarantine for a month. It was then that Nadjari first heard about the mass killings:

“Various rumors began to circulate, that those who have gone left in the trucks after we disembarked from the train have been burned, after they killed them. Of course we did not believe it and thought that the Poles in the camp were telling us this to demoralize us, make us ill and take our bread.” (p. 76)

Finally he was sent to Block 13, the block of the *Sonderkommandos*, where he was assigned to work in Crematorium III. So let’s see the description of a gassing (pp. 86-91). The first stage was as follows:

“They would arrive at our yard and then go down the stairs to the Auskleidungsraum where we received them. We would first tell them to sit to rest for a while, if of course the German wasn’t looking, then the Germans would shout followed by us Ausziehen, that is undress. The little girls were ashamed and had a lot of trouble undressing, they would cry out of shame and not because they would die in a few minutes as they did not know that. Other women would give us gold coins saying it’s a gift. We would take them, although we had no use for them, so that the Germans who were wandering around like crows would not have them. Still other women more mature and smart would come at us asking if they were going to die. I would always say that I did not understand German or any other language but Greek.”

The second stage followed:

“When the women had finished undressing, they would enter through the door in groups of five, naked, with shoes in hand and many with a soap. [...] Afterwards, the men would go down to the undressing room, wondering how they could get their clothes back, since they had all turned into a sea, the same procedure would follow, and they would also enter the gas room. Then, after it was filled and everyone had entered the gas room, the door was closed and, immediately afterwards, the two gas experts climbed above and opened 4 cans and emptied them from above either laughing or chatting about various irrelevant things. They put back the concrete slab. Many times they came down to the small scuttle on the door, watching, with a stopwatch in hand, the minutes needed so that none remains alive

(a matter of 6-7 minutes). The moment the door was shut well and they threw the first gas can from the hole, the people realized they were going to die.”

The contradictions with the official storyline have already been pointed out in the previous article. What remains are two contradictions with Manuscript A.

First, in that manuscript the Germans force the victims into the chamber with whips whereas here they use deception. And second, in A we read about “openings” while here there is only one “hole”.

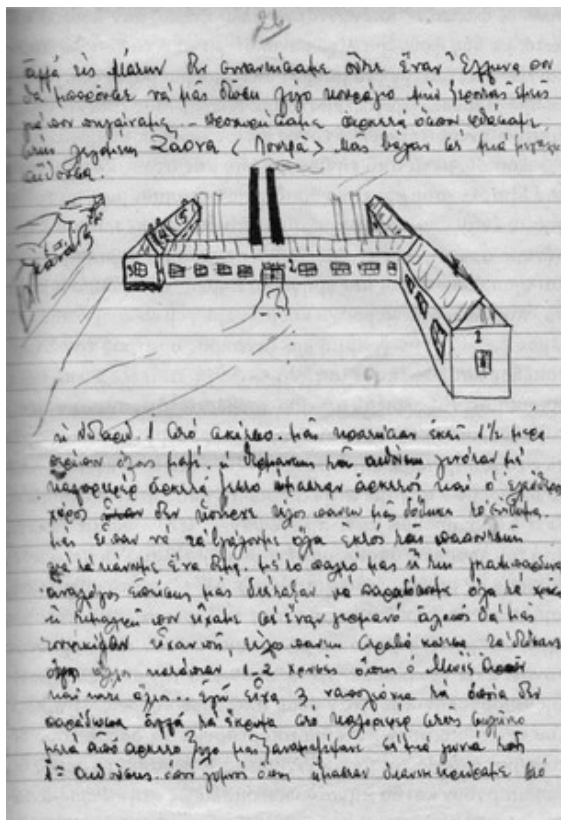
“After about one hour of the killing of these people, special airing devices which we had [...] would suck the polluted air so by opening the door we would only hear the clatter of the bodies gathered around the door which would fall violently on the cement floor.”

In Manuscript A the door opens after half an hour and the work begins right away. Here the ventilation starts after one hour and it works for an unspecified amount of time before the door opens.

“They were all calm. In this human sea we would observe such a serenity that I had doubts whether these indeed were the ones who a while ago were talking with us, who shouted, whose faces had the expression of fear, of terror. Now they looked calm as if they were resting, many were still looking upwards and pointing with their index finger at the sky.”

As the Italians would say, *se non è vero, è ben trovato* (even if it is not true, it is well conceived).

One last noteworthy fact before moving on to the matter of Nadjari’s own survival. Original pages of the manuscript are reproduced in the book. In some of them the text is accompanied by sketches. Two examples:



Pages 26 and 29 of the original.

On the left is the Sauna where Nadjari indicates with numbers all the rooms he went through while on the right there are the barracks with the triple bunk beds. So here is the question: How many sketches of the crematoriums are there?

Answer: **None!** For reasons unknown, Nadjari neglected to depict the most important part of his testimony. He has also drawn a rough sketch of Bunker 2, as well as a map of the camp which fills an entire page, yet the crematoriums are nowhere to be found???

So finally, if Nadjari was a member of the *Sonderkommando*, how did he survive? Well, the information he gives about this is peculiar. First, on the demolition of the Crematoriums II and III (with the help of some girls) he writes:

"I, in every way, was trying to explain to Ninetta and the other girls how the Germans killed so many thousands, the mode of operation, how we were burning the bodies. Although they would see them in front of them, they could not believe it. I was explaining them this because we of the Sonderkommando were certain that we would not live, they would kill us beforehand, before liberation, because our eyes had seen more than they should have. This was not a reason not to be cheerful, and in fact I pretty much was. I would even set up a theater and they were all excited, specifically in fact, on January 1, 1945, I performed in the Auskleidungsraum of Crematorium I, where Ninetta and Paulina were present. As it seemed all of them were very pleased." (p. 101)

One wonders which one is harder to believe: That Nadjari was in such a good mood or that he set up a show in the crematorium?

"On January 18, 1945 the evacuation of Birkenau Auschwitz was at an end. We, since morning, had been shut away in Block 13. We were a hundred. Our anguish was indescribable. While the others were leaving the camp, we were locked up. They had emptied the entire camp, the only ones left were us and some other little departments and almost all of the Germans. Every so often we would hear blasting around us and especially in the crematoriums. Around dusk, we suddenly see a huge column of prisoners who had left at noon returning back to the camp. We could not stand it anymore being shut away, we exited the Block and intermingled with the others. They looked for us a couple of times but none of us showed up." (p. 102)

So this is how they escaped. They intermingled with other prisoners and the Germans lost them. Even if this was possible Nadjari forgot to explain something very simple: How exactly did they exit the block if they were locked up?

Summary

Nadjari's manuscripts contradict both themselves and the official storyline, and even make it hard to determine whether he actually worked in a crematorium. What is certain is that they contain obviously false statements that any historian would pretend were never there.

Notes

[1] <https://codoh.com/library/document/5161/?lang=en>

[2] W. Huber, *Die Feuerbestattung – ein Postulat kultureller Entwicklung, und das St. Galler Krematorium*, self-published by the author, St. Gallen 1903, p. 17.

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